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ABSTRACT

The Association for Graduate Education and Research in North Texas (TAGER), interconnects nine colleges and universities over a 2,000 square mile area. Approximately 100,000 post-secondary students and about 5,000 faculty members use on-campus studio classrooms offering credit courses and other academic programs desired by member institutions. The network is expanding to begin cooperative videopublishing among universities which will also include important changes in the governing structure of TAGER. In short, videopublishing involves a richer mix than simply a canned television course. It involves faculty improvement; it involves selling to administrators, to fund providers, and, most of all, to faculties. It involves the combination of taped sequences, film, live lectures, talkback, and almost all of the arts of television production. Properly understood, adequately funded, and appropriately used, cooperative videopublishing could offer as much. (WCM)

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Prospects for Coordinated Videopublishing among Universities

by Bryce Jordan

I am a layman among professionals, and I can only hope that I don't end up being a lamb among wolves. As a music historian who doesn't know a gigahertz from a film chain, I come to you with the conviction that educational media, which had a chance sometime ago to be extremely effective, has not been universally successful. The field, I believe, has a chance once again to become a principal means of transferring knowledge, enjoyment, and understanding, but only if the dollars can be found.

What I am going to present in this paper is a case study of how an educational television operation, successful over a number of years, can be updated to become more attractive to those people who are the only reason for its existence – namely, the students who use it. For a moment, then, let me describe this operation to you.

THE TAGER PROGRAM

TAGER, The Association for Graduate Education and Research in North Texas, is now in its seventh academic year of operating The Green Network, a closed-circuit microwave educational television system which interconnects nine colleges and universities over approximately 2,000

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square miles in the North Texas area. There are in that 2,000 square miles approximately 100,000 post-secondary students of various kinds and about 5,000 faculty members. Each TAGER institution has established on-campus studio classrooms which enable it to offer over the network certain credit courses and other academic programs desired by member institutions. It is also possible for each institution to receive courses and programs.

It is well known to most of you professionals that one of the most active and effective uses of TAGER television over the years has been the graduate instruction which Southern Methodist University's Institute of Technology has provided to the high-technology industries of North Central Texas. Beyond that kind of activity, however, the system has in recent years begun to serve in a very effective way at the undergraduate level, utilizing some of the fine liberal arts colleges which belong to the network.

TAGER television customarily carries about 75 three-credit courses each semester, involving between 1,600 and 2,000 students. One of its real strengths is the talkback feature which is available to all students and to all classrooms within the system. Each student is able to maintain his status as an active participant on the whole network, and those who listen are able to take advantage not only of the lectures and illustrations, but also of the questions from other students and the answers which go back in response to the questions.

One thing has happened in TAGER in recent times which is of very great importance. There is now a hospital wing, if you will, to the network. The University of Texas Health Science Center in Dallas is now able to carry a television presentation of grand rounds in the teaching hospital to various other hospitals in Dallas. Further, we hope that these transmissions will before long be carried to other cities such as Sherman, which is 60 miles to the north.

We are very much aware that the present television system has not only the possibility of expanding and improving its interinstitutional course offerings but also making available the extension of academic service to new clients – that is, those individuals who want independent study, continuing education, refreshment, and retraining. This is one of the policies I think TAGER will pursue during the next few years, pushing its extension activity beyond the industrial interconnects, which have worked so effectively for the SMU Institute of Technology and for certain of the business schools in the area, to other kinds of continuing education.

This brief description of the TAGER television network, along with a hint of the network's future potential, will serve as an introduction to the topic which I have been assigned more recently – namely, "Prospects for Coordinated Videopublishing among Universities."

COOPERATIVE TV PUBLISHING

Let me say first off that my understanding of the definition of videopublishing may be a bit broader than what has been stated here so far, which seems to consist of vast shelves of videotaped courses. We at TAGER are looking at the possibility of cooperative "educational T.V. publishing" in a somewhat broader context as we study the Green Network and its potential.

As I noted earlier, TAGER TV has moved to various kinds of undergraduate activities with considerable success. Primarily, these have taken place in the summer and have involved environmental studies offered by Austin College, Dallas Baptist College, Texas Wesleyan College, and Bishop College. This effort has been influential, I think, in pointing toward more cooperative curricular planning, no small accomplishment. Beyond this summertime environmental studies effort, TAGER has now mounted two cooperative degree curricula which will soon be available over the network to all TAGER members. One program will deal with the classics simply because no institution offers a full curriculum or has a broad enough range of courses to offer a first-rate opportunity in the field to students. Also, the attraction of that offering was not great enough at any one campus to cause an institution to produce a complete faculty, a good library in the field, and so on. The other planned cooperative curriculum is an undergraduate degree sequence in computer science.

Cooperative educational endeavors – particularly when they are put together by both private and public institutions, from both research and undergraduate institutions, from both Baptist and Catholic institutions – are, on the face of it, difficult things to bring off. We have recently begun to change the governing structure of TAGER, and I want to tell you a little about that, because governance of the network may be the most important factor in producing cooperative educational program planning among diverse institutions. There is a lay board of trustees which does not meet very often, and is not, as far as I am concerned, involved in the network as much as it should be. Then there is a rather active group of presidents – the nine chief executives of the institutions on the network – called the Board of Governing Participants.

Last summer, we decided to reorganize a third and important part of the governing structure, the Academic Planning Council. This group consisting of appointees from the faculties of the various TAGER institutions, was responsible for recommending the network's offerings. Despite the proddings of a series of excellent chairmen, the work of this group lacked the verve and broad-gauge concern it should have had. I suspect that a variety of factors – lack of motivation, fear of competition from rival institutions, lack of conviction as to the effectiveness of educational television – contributed to the absence of network-wide

concern which should emanate from such a group.

At any rate, we changed the structure of the Academic Planning Council so that it now consists of the chief academic officers of each of the nine member institutions. In other words, the academic planning group now consists of individuals who sit very close to the president's office, and who have primary responsibility for their institution's academic well being. Sitting with that group are the programming coordinators on each campus. In some cases these latter individuals are communications professionals, in most cases on the software side, and in one or two cases concerned with hardware. This new arrangement, I believe, is going to have a positive effect on what TAGER is able to do for the entire region.

In addition to TAGER, there is in North Central Texas a second body of universities and colleges called the Inter-University Council (IUC). This group is also engaged in cooperative educational activities, and its most recent project has been the establishment of an on-line library cataloging system feeding out of the Ohio College Library Center in Columbus, Ohio. This operation will go on line in North Texas in the next couple of months.

Recently, I.U.C., a 14-institution group, has joined with TAGER in a kind of loose corporate affiliation so that the strengths of the two organizations are now operating together. The Executive Director of TAGER, Mr. Ross Peavey, has also become Executive Director of the Inter-University Council. This is another encouraging development which should enable us to move TAGER forward.

Still another factor points to the strengthening of TAGER. In September of 1972, there was organized among all of the higher education institutions in North Central Texas what was called the North Texas Higher Education Study, chaired jointly by President John Moseley of Austin College and by myself. What the study attempted to do was to look at all of the higher education facilities in the North Central Texas area in order to try to determine where the prospects existed for cooperative activity. This is a difficult kind of analysis to attempt, and the study was not always successful in getting the data it needed. Some things were learned, however, including that fact that the best place to start cooperative effort is in an area where technology is involved. Thus, the IUC on-line cataloguing system is about to be activated.

Thus, also, TAGER has begun to plan a kind of activity that you might call a coordinated videopublishing venture. The North Texas Higher Education Study recommended that TAGER do certain things about its programming. One of the things that it observed – and I was interested that Paul Caravatt made a point of this also – was that the average student on TAGER (although he is a regular college student, and thus fairly sophisticated) comes to the network having seen some very slick production techniques on regular commercial television. The North Texas

Study made the point rather strongly that since TAGER was not now able to produce that same kind of attractive format, the educational network would suffer. We think that there may be ways at least to do some pilot projects of high audio and visual quality, and I will refer to that effort again in a moment.

We think also that TAGER must find a means of marketing its product to its educational audience in a better way and of making itself more attractive to the student. The original philosophy of TAGER, when it was started some seven or eight years ago, was simply that the classroom atmosphere would be reproduced as much as possible over the network. We now believe that that is not adequate, and I think that Paul Caravatt attempted to underline that in his paper.

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF PRODUCTION

So quality of production is one of our main problems. What we are interested in attempting to do is to put together a cooperative production unit or center which would help us improve our look and sound. We are fortunate that there are among our network institutions two fine facilities which may make this a fairly easy thing to do. At the far north end of the network at Austin College, there is a first-rate media production center, a gift of Mr. and Mrs. Cecil Green, the benefactors who created the Green Network. At Dallas Baptist College on the south side of Dallas, there exists another fine center. We are proposing to find the means of using those two centers to establish a kind of videopublishing unit which would create products that would be useful to the entire network.

Our concept of what a videopublisher is, however, is a bit broader than simply that of a unit which produces canned courses. We would anticipate that our center would involve itself in training faculty how to make better use of technology; it would be concerned with providing better visual aids in the live lecture; it might involve itself in totally taped, one-way courses which would be offered once or twice a week, with the network's talkback feature utilized in addition for review sections.

We have decided that the first step in bringing about a cooperative production effort ought to be the creation of a high quality prototype course. This model, which likely would combine live lectures, videotape, and talkback sessions, could show all of the institutions on the network and also potential financial backing (whether it be board of trustees, a foundation, or the legislature) that is is possible to do a superior job of providing an educational product, one that can compete at least to a limited extent with what the student sees over commercial television. While this project lies in the future, it has already been outlined, the proposal has been written, and strong efforts are under way to get the venture started.

If this effort is a success, we have hopes that the next step might be a limited kind of funding for enrichment of current TAGER course offerings. Let me repeat that there continue to be the kinds of problems which are always associated with cooperative educational efforts, particularly when the constituences are varied as ours are. Institutional prerogatives and faculty fears continue to be stumbling blocks; and the problem of paying for the enterprise is made more difficult by the fact that there are both private and public institutions involved, with widely varying credit hour costs.

To summarize, videopublishing, as we see it, involves a richer mix than simply a canned television course. It involves faculty improvement; it involves selling – to administrations, to fund providers, and, most of all, to faculties. It involves the combination of taped sequences, film, live lectures, talkback, and almost all of the arts of television production. Properly understood, adequately funded, and appropriately used, cooperative videopublishing could offer us much.